The **Transforming Power** of the **Liturgy**

Racism & Prejudice

In the Book of Revelation, St. John describes a vision of the worship of the heavenly Jerusalem: "a great multitude, which no one could count, *from every nation, race, people, and tongue* [who] stood before the throne and before the Lamb" (7:9, emphasis added). That vision is the pattern for the Church's worship on earth, the object of our hope, and a model for our common life together – a divinely established communion of diverse peoples. The liturgy has the power to transform us into men and women who uphold the dignity of all races and ethnicities.

Theology

The origin of every human being is the love of God, and all human beings equally and fully bear God's image. In the fullness of time, God sent his Son for the salvation of all, "not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pt 3:9). This salvation is received in a particular way through the sacraments of the Church, and Pope Francis reminds us that the invitation to the sacraments is universal, and the Church's mission is to extend that invitation to every man and woman (cf. *Desiderio desideravi*, no. 5). Additionally, participation in Christ's death and resurrection through the sacraments deepens and transforms the communion established at creation: "we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another" (Rom 12:5). The sin of racism rejects these fundamental truths: our common origin and dignity, our common call to salvation, and our common destiny in the Kingdom of Heaven. The sin of racism rejects the demands of our new life in Christ.

Liturgy

The liturgy, the sign and instrument of communion, stands forth as a beacon of hope for the Church and the world. The Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, makes us one and gives us the strength to go forth with the gift of unity that we have received. Our liturgical experience of communion in diversity gives us a foretaste of the communion which we are called to live and foster outside the Church's walls. The many, diverse parish communities in the United States are models not only for ecclesial life but also for our civic life. There is hard work to be done, and there is great hope.

> "The Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, makes us one and gives us the strength to go forth with the gift of unity that we have received."

In 2016, dioceses across the country were invited to observe a Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities on September 9, the Memorial of St. Peter Claver. Some communities continue to observe this day, and resources may be found at USCCB.org/racism. At this webpage, there are also numerous resources for prayer, for example, a Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land, a Holy Hour Against Racism, a Stations of the Cross for Overcoming Racism, and sample texts for the Universal Prayer. Some of these resources are also available in Spanish.

Among its Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, the *Roman Missal* contains several Masses that are especially connected to this theme:

- "For Promoting Harmony" (no. 15)
- "For Reconciliation" (no. 16)
- "For the Progress of Peoples" (no. 29)
- "For the Preservation of Peace and Justice" (no. 30)

Vestments of the color of the day or liturgical time are used, but should these celebrations have a more penitential character, the color violet may be worn. One of the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation is appropriately used with each of these formularies. The Preface of Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I highlights the reconciliation of the human race with God the Father ("Reconciliation with the Father in Christ") and the Preface of Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II highlights the reconciliation of human beings with one another ("The Gift of Mutual Reconciliation").

Action

To care for the dignity of all races and ethnicities is a task for individuals and communities. A good place to begin is the 2018 pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops against racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love." In it, the bishops reflect upon the experience of Native American, African American, and Hispanic persons and highlight ways for us to "open wide our hearts," for example, by acknowledging sin, by being open to encounter and new relationships, and by changing structures. This letter and accompanying study materials are available at USCCB.org/racism.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

© 2024 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. This resource may be reproduced free of charge in printed form, for non-commercial purposes, and in publications not for sale.